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THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

The leftist Muslim forces under the overall leadership of Kamal Jumblatt are continuing to drive against Christian strongholds in Beirut and in the mountains east of the capital. The direct Syrian mediation effort has stalled [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The Syrians are now banking on Fatah chief Yasir Arafat--whose aid to the leftists has been largely responsible for their recent military success--to persuade Jumblatt to accept a cease-fire. Syria could increase its leverage over Arafat by cutting off its military aid to Fatah, and probably has already threatened to do so.

Arafat's next move is the key to the military situation. His forces have spearheaded major leftist gains; if he keeps them committed, there is no hope for an immediate cease-fire. If Arafat orders Fatah and other independent fedayeen groups to stop aiding Jumblatt and his leftist allies, renegade army officer Ahmad Khatib and Muslim radical leader Ibrahim Qulaylat, the leftists would be unable to press their current military advantage against the Christians much further.

The Christian Position

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Leftist forces made some additional inroads against the Christians yesterday [REDACTED]

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We believe the Christians can hold out

against a leftist offensive on the current scale for another several weeks. The Christians might be able to hold the bulk of this core area indefinitely if the level of fighting declined significantly. The commercial and port sections of Beirut, long held by the Christians, probably would be lost to the leftists.

Overall, the Christians, though nearly equal in numbers to the 15,000-20,000 leftists under Jumblatt's umbrella command, are inferior to them in supplies and military equipment.

If heavy fighting continues beyond the next several weeks, the leftists are likely to be able to make inroads into the Christian core area. The Christians might resort to a formal declaration of partition designed to dramatize their claim on international support, but that would not change their military position. The Muslims would not accept partition and, as time goes on, Muslim successes could lead to the steady disintegration of a unified Christian defense. Eventually, the major Christian areas--perhaps minus some strongholds for a time--would be absorbed into an Arab Lebanon.

The Political Negotiations

All of the leftist leaders--except Jumblatt--agreed yesterday to support a Syrian brokered compromise. The Syrian compromise calls for:

- an immediate cease-fire;
- a meeting of the Lebanese parliament to amend the constitution;
- election of a new president by parliament.

Jumblatt is apparently holding out in hopes of securing more territory, such as the port area of Beirut, in order to strengthen his future bargaining position. Arafat is unlikely to persuade Jumblatt to accept a truce until he orders Fatah to halt support of the leftist military operations. We believe Arafat is moving in this direction in part because he believes he should not risk further alienating Asad, and in part because he may anticipate large-scale Syrian intervention.

Arafat's immediate interest now probably is to secure a truce that would leave the leftists in a favorable negotiating position, while avoiding the diminution in his own influence that might result from further direct Syrian intervention. Arafat originally formed a loose alliance with the Lebanese leftist leaders to protect his revolutionary credentials and Palestinian interests against the rapidly growing Syrian influence in Lebanon. As leftist momentum has grown in recent weeks, he has provided direct military assistance in order to avoid any accusations, after a leftist victory, that he remained on the sidelines. Now that he has achieved this goal, he needs to mend fences with Syria, which is still his main source of military support.

The Question of Syrian Intervention

At present, the Syrians are suspicious of Arafat's intentions

The prospects for any further Syrian intervention thus also depend heavily on Arafat's next move.

Syrian forces generally remain in a high state of alert, but we have no indications of unusual Syrian or Israeli military activity. The US defense attaché in Damascus saw no evidence yesterday of Syrian troop movements that might be related to the Lebanese situation.

